

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD, 3 July 2025

Subject Heading:

Update - Customer Services Strategy

SLT Lead:

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Policy context:

The Board is asked to review the work that has taken place so far to implement the Customer Services Strategy

SUMMARY

In July 2024, a new Customer Service Strategy and set of Customer Service Standards was agreed by Cabinet. The Strategy set out a roadmap with actions that would be taken to ultimately, improve the Customer Service experience of our residents. This report seeks to update on this work, which is led by the AD for Customer, Registration & Bereavement Services, sitting within the IT, Digital & Customer Service Directorate. This reports sets the framework for this piece of work and details an update on the main actions taken so far.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board reviews the work undertaken so far to implement the Customer Services Strategy and makes any recommendations it considers appropriate.

REPORT DETAIL

The Customer Services Strategy sets out a roadmap / plan which aims to put the resident/customer at the heart of everything we do and ensure the best experience possible when people need to contact us.

The ethos of the strategy is to do everything we can to ensure the best experience possible when people need to contact us. The key principles being to deliver excellent customer service in every interaction with our residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Whilst we know there are excellent examples of customer service happening across the organisation, and a variety of projects that have already brought about a better customer experience, It is also recognised there is still some way to go and room for improvement, not helped by pressure on our existing resources and some changes in the way services are delivered since the Covid 19 pandemic. It is recognised that to be better at Customer Service, we need to review existing processes and procedures; existing functionality; and identify possible solutions within a challenging funding climate.

Paramount to this is the mission to embed a customer centric culture across the Council. It isn't just about processes and procedures but 'hearts & minds' too. We are working to develop a culture where delivering good customer service is engrained into our daily working lives, it is part of what we do naturally and a regular topic of conversation where we all share a common goal – to ensure we provide the best possible customer service experience. We want to embed a listening culture, and one where the customer experience is consistent no matter which service is contacted. This reports summarises the work we have been doing so far, and the journey we are on, to aim to achieve this.

The roadmap sets out a 4 year plan, consisting of a number of actions as set out in the table below, categorised into 3 main areas:

- 1) Embedding a Customer Centric Culture;
- 2) Modernise Service Delivery
- 3) Improve the Customer Experience:



Since the Strategy was agreed, work has commenced to implement the actions arising recognising that it is challenging, that this is a journey and direction of travel, and that it will take time to achieve the outcomes. With an ever changing landscape we also recognise that we will need to review the Strategy at regular intervals.

The work is led by Customer Services, sitting within the newly formed IT, Digital & Customer Services Directorate. Customer Services taking an approach to lead by example the principles and aims of the Strategy, already providing excellent frontline services with high performing teams via the Corporate Contact Centre, Town Hall Appointment Centre and other essential high contact frontline services (the Registration and Cemeteries & Crematorium Service).

The work is underpinned by support from the ICS (Institute of Customer Services), whom we joined, on a 3 year membership basis in 2024 and with whom we are working closely.

Since the publication of the Customer Services Strategy the following has been actioned or is underway under each of the three categories outlined in the 4 year plan:

M1 - Embed a Customer Centric Culture

Actions
<p><u>Promote New Strategy & Standards</u></p> <p>An Official launch took place during National Customer Services Week in October 2024, which included the launch of a new Intranet page dedicated to Customer Services, where both the Strategy and Standards can easily be found for staff reference. Customer Service standards. This was launched and followed up by printed material available for offices, so that awareness could start to be raised about this piece of work, the importance of Customer Service, and the standards which all staff should work to.</p>
<p><u>Develop Hybrid Contact Centre</u></p> <p>From August 24, all team members all present in the office (Town Hall) at least one day a week. This ensures the Appointment Centre can be resourced and fosters a 'team' environment to support good learning practises. Performance is robustly monitored.</p>
<p><u>Measure Customer Feedback</u></p> <p>Across our corporate Contact Centre Telephony solution a post call survey was introduced enabling customers to provide their experience and register their satisfaction, following their interaction with the Contact Centre, which also provides valuable insight and helping where necessary to make improvements.</p> <p>Customer Service / satisfaction surveys have also been introduced by other Services, including Registration & Bereavement Services and Housing Services with the aim to help shape service delivery and where identified make improvements.</p> <p>Where it is identified services are not capturing feedback, or the way they are capturing feedback needs improving, work is underway to action this via the Customer Champions group (see p6), utilising the corporate 'Citizenspace' platform.</p>
<p><u>Conduct External Benchmarking</u></p>

The Strategy sets out a commitment to carry out external benchmarking and in order to achieve this, we worked with the ICS in November 2024 and launched a resident satisfaction survey. The survey provided some useful data and insight, and is being used in service reviews to identify where customer service improvements need to be made.

Review Telephony

Underway. The contract for the existing Corporate Contact Centre telephony solution (8x8) expires July 2026. This provides an opportunity to review existing functionality and consider what we would like from a new system going forward. A project board has been established and we are in the early stages of undergoing a procurement exercise, starting with a gathering requirements exercise.

The gathering exercise is to ensure, before going to the market, that we list our requirements in terms of the new Contact Centre solutions functionality. In carrying out this exercise however, we are looking at the wider organisations requirements too, to determine what other Services may benefit from the functionality on offer, being minded of the cost / benefits realisation of any other Services coming on board.

Discussions are being had with Services to assess the benefits of their calls going through the corporate call centre, where they do not already. This would be particularly relevant for high call traffic frontline services and would support the aim of consistency of service when customers interact us (an example of recent success in this area is the transfer of Parks call to the Call Centre in Feb 25 – see p8).

We are also including other key requirements, listing how we can harness the use of AI, virtual agents and intelligent chat bots, with any new solution. The aim to have this procured and installed for July 2026.

Additional actions:

- **Implementation of a Mandatory Customer Services Theme in all PDRs from 25/26:**

“Demonstrate how you have achieved excellent customer service in line with the [Customer Services Strategy](#) and [New Customer Standards](#)”

This has been Introduced to help encourage an environment where Customer Services is regularly discussed, to encourage staff ownership and investment into the delivery of good customer service.

- **Integration of Customer Services to the Corporate Induction for all new starters**

In place from July 25. To ensure all new starters from commencement of their employment are aware of the importance of good customer service; the strategy & standards.

Planned: Mandatory Customer Services training via the LXP corporate platform is currently being devised

M2: Modernise Service Delivery

Actions

Review Town Hall Services

Following a review with AM colleagues, there is now a regular customer service presence on the main Town Hall reception to provide an improved experience for those requiring face to face help or advice, but without an appointment (those with an appointment using the Town Hall Appointment Centre).

This will be further improved by a refurbishment planned for the space located next to the Town Hall reception, to provide a bank of extra workstations. When this is completed, (intended completion is October 25), it is intended Customer Services staff will use this space, being in a closer proximity to assist those requiring help at the Town Hall reception.

Roll out Case Tracker Complaints & Member enquiries

The Soft Launch of Case Tracker for Members Enquires was completed on schedule in May 2025.

9 Members participated and completed 115 enquires through the system. Full roll out is now underway, with 2 training sessions to be held in June for a further 11 Members. Additional training is scheduled for July and August, and potentially September (dependant on member's uptake of training).

Based on agreement by Senior Leaders, the project aims to complete the training and roll out for all members by the end of September.

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M3: Improve Customer Experience

Actions
<p>Remove old web content & Refresh Website</p> <p>In place from June 24. The refreshed website was enhanced to bring about a number of benefits, to the customer experience, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved accessibility• A translation tool• Improved Search Engine Optimisation, design and layout making it easier for customers to navigate and use• More efficient alert deployments and• an improved customer feedback module <p>The customer feedback module has proved very useful in bringing to attention useful comments and observations that would sometimes go undetected, but are now fixed immediately, preventing a poor experience continuing for others</p>
<p>Establish Customer Experience Team</p> <p>It is recognised that in order to achieve the desired outcomes that align with the Strategy, a commitment from the whole Council was required. For that reason, Directors were asked to nominate customer focussed staff members within their services to collectively commit to supporting the principles of the Strategy and form a 'Customer Champions Network/Experience Team'.</p> <p>It is via this network of staff that work is now underway to review services, starting with Services with high volume customer contact but a comparatively lower satisfaction score (ICS) than others. Led by the AD for Customer, Registration & Bereavement Services, champions are or will be reviewing their service with a view of identifying short/medium and long term improvements. Officers with expertise in niche areas are supporting as 'advocates' in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Telephone/Digital Experience➤ Complaint handling➤ Feedback and training

The process of review of each service will take time, there is an aim to complete at least 4 service reviews by the end of the year.

Via these service reviews it is intended that shared learning and the capturing of insights will happen and be included as part of the feedback and outcomes,

Join up Social Media & CC Teams

With effect from 1st July 2024, Customer Services took over the administration of Social Media enquiries, from the Communications team, in order to be able to pick out and reply more effectively to any of the transactional enquiries received via this channel, from customers.

To date, over 500 social media enquiries have been received per month either through Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and LinkedIn. The team view each one, responding to those customers seeking advice / wishing to report / make a service request, which has led to an improved service for customers choosing this channel to interact with us. Any reputational type comments / statements made by customers are routed to the Communications team, for them to administer and respond too, if deemed appropriate.

Additional Actions: transfer of Parks calls to the Contact Centre:

In February 2025, the Customer Services Contact Centre took on the front line service for Parks enquiries/calls. Although quite small demand in comparison to the high volume service's the Centre is used to looking after, and although Parks had an online presence for its customers, it had very minimal resources available to take calls. Often, by their own admission, resulting in customers having to leave enquiries on an answerphone to be called back.

Taking over Parks calls has led to an improved customer journey and experience for those customers that don't have access to online services and would like to speak to someone.

In summary, it is intended to continue with the important work that is already underway, prioritising the service reviews initially. Further work streams are planned which include, amongst other things, the setting up of a resident panel; monitoring and reporting against the standards; mystery shopping; development of customer training; review use of AI and technology to improve the customer experience.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are none.

BACKGROUND PAPERS